

The following email was received by the Michigan Department of Education on December 24, 2003 regarding the announcement of Mad Cow Disease (BSE) in the United States. For further information regarding this disease, please refer to the USDA website as listed in the last paragraph.

On December 23, Secretary Veneman announced that USDA had diagnosed a presumptive positive case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in an adult Holstein cow in the state of Washington. She stated, "Despite this finding, we remain confident in the safety of our beef supply. The risk to human health from BSE is extremely low." The suspect cow was defined as a "downer" animal, which means too sick or injured to walk. USDA procurement specifications for beef specifically prohibit the use of meat from downer animals. The condition of the animal was the result of acute calving complications.

According to our Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), USDA has purchased none of the implicated beef products for distribution through the National School Lunch Program, or other Federal food and nutrition programs. Per AMS, USDA has never had contracts with any of the involved plants, they are not part of the supply chain for USDA purchases. In addition, by specification, AMS does not allow beef that is mechanically separated from bone with automatic deboning systems, advanced lean (meat) recovery (AMR) systems, or powered knives for any commodity program.

Regarding the suspect cow in the state of Washington, as a precaution, the slaughterhouse that handled the animal announced a voluntary recall of 10,410 pounds of raw beef. The diseased parts of the suspect dairy cow, i.e., the brain and spinal tissues, were sent to a rendering plant and did not enter the food supply. The voluntary recall of the 10,410 pounds of beef was issued out of an abundance of caution. USDA will conduct a recall as soon as investigators have determined the extent of beef products that may contain parts of the infected animal. For the record, muscle cuts of meat have almost no risk of BSE. The materials where the BSE agent resides, i.e., the brain, spinal cord, distal ileum, did not enter the food supply.

Regular updates are available on the USDA website, www.USDA.gov <<http://www.USDA.gov>>. We will provide you with additional information as it becomes available. States will need to make their own decisions about whether to change existing orders, but we do want to stress again our confidence in the safety of the beef supplied to our schools and other recipients.